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Marc Camille Chaimowicz

Citation for published version:

Thompson, S 2010, 'Marc Camille Chaimowicz', *MAP: Journeys in Contemporary Art*, no. 24.
<<http://mapmagazine.co.uk/map-24/review/marc-camille-chaimowicz/>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Published In:

MAP: Journeys in Contemporary Art

Publisher Rights Statement:

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MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ

31 October–6 February, Inverleith House, Edinburgh

Writing of the cork-lined, precisely arranged room which collapsed the divisions of refuge, bedroom, memory and study at Marcel Proust's home on 102 Boulevard Haussmann, the writer Diana Fuss emphasised the 'importance of material objects as personal vehicles of memory and antidotes to lost time' in the arrangement of the room's interior and the placement of objects within it.

The new and historical works shown by Marc Camille Chaimowicz here echo this Proustian sense of seeing objects as animated characters, anthropomorphic receptacles for memory which are capable of 'pulling the past into the present', madeleine-like.

In the context of contemporary art practice the exhibition is a revelation (thank god for an artist who feels no need to enclose the word beauty in parentheses) and a reminder that the issues evoked by his work are as urgent and timely today as they were in the 1970s. The show brings together a *mise-en-scène* composed of chairs, dressing tables, bookcases, ceramics, found objects, wallpaper, drawings, textiles and paintings and a rug commissioned by Chaimowicz in association with Edinburgh's Dovecot Studios. Through the synthesis of these elements the gallery is transformed into an installation reminiscent of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art.

More choreographed than curated, the works highlight the artist's continuing preoccupation with the slippage between the prosaic function of objects and their poetic form. As such, they act as a metaphor for, or distillation of, wider cultural and intellectual debates – since works such as 'Celebration?', 'Realife' and 'Enough Tyranni' in the 1970s, the artist has consistently sought to undermine and question society's ongoing insistence on seeing the world in terms of stark binary oppositions (he once spoke of his interest in 'the discerning of a secret femininity in the most male of men'). Unlike many of his more didactic (or dogmatic) contemporaries, however, Chaimowicz has dealt with these interests in a subtle, nuanced manner which invites (rather than demands) a reflective, thoughtful engagement on the part of the viewer. At Inverleith House, the premises on which divisions such as design/art, male/female, past/present, artist/audience and art/life are based, are thrown into question through form.

To discuss individual works in isolation would be to miss the point of this experiential, immersive encounter with 'things'. Like Janette Laverrière's work, Chaimowicz appears to privilege allegorical content over utility in his objects. The two versions of 'Coiffeuse', 2008, and 'Bibliothèque', 2009, seen 'dressed' and 'undressed', again suggest that these pieces are potentially animate, and as languid and elegant as their owners. In contrast to many artists who loosely appropriate the 'grammar of design', Chaimowicz's works across all media are exquisitely rendered and beguiling in their appearance. The use of artworks which look like, or 'are' design might also have been employed to bridge the 'alienating distance between the viewer and the work', one of the artists' primary critical intentions.

Many of the strategies and approaches which are now commonplace in the pluralist, interdisciplinary practices of younger contemporary artists were pioneered by Chaimowicz in the 1970s. In Scotland, for example, there are echoes of Chaimowicz's self-referential approach to exhibiting in Tatham and O'Sullivan's tendency to revisit past artworks alongside entirely new works. In their blend of performance and lens-based installation, often playing with refracted and reflected light and shadow, Jenny Hogarth and Kim Coleman could also be regarded as inheritors of Chaimowicz's aesthetic. And whilst, obviously, 'designart' is nothing new, Chaimowicz's particular commitment to the interplay between the fine and applied arts, has been taken up with enthusiasm by a younger generation of artists such as Jim Lambie and Martin Boyce. There has also been a renewed, post-Warholian interest in using wallpaper as both a

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designed object and a way of demarcating space in a gallery or studio setting (Lucy McKenzie, Fiona Jardine, Pio Abad and Julie Roberts have all recently explored the use of wallpaper as an integral part of installation).

In turn, Chaimowicz acknowledges his own exemplars and influences in this exhibition, both directly in the *intimiste* interiors of Édouard Vuillard, whose 1910 painting 'La Chambre Rose' is exhibited here (he similarly worked across disciplines) and Raoul Dufy, whose 'Four Floral Studies' adorns the wall of the first floor to more indirect reference points. The pattern of some works recall Keith Haring's pop sensibility, though the palette is more akin to Matisse or Duncan Grant's work for the Omega Workshop.

Chaimowicz's work flies in the face of detractors who equate 'beauty' with conservatism. The exhibition is a testament to the notion that visual and sensory pleasure need not operate on a different plane to works which are politically and socially engaged or which engage with 'real life' beyond the studio. Not least, it is heartening to see the forms, colours and imagery historically and ideologically associated with a feminine (and therefore supposedly 'corrupt') aesthetic handled with such verve and finesse, without the typical recourse to the visual tropes of camp or kitsch. It's enough to make Adolf Loos spin in his austere, macho grave.

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